

AROUND THE CORPS IN BRIEF

Operation Striking Hawk wraps up

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, Ariz. - A detachment of 1,100 Marines attached to Marine Aircraft Group-14 visited the station recently to take part in Exercise Striking Hawk '03.

The exercise tests the concept of offensive air support and simulates all the nuts and bolts of an air combat element during a Marine Expeditionary Brigade.

According to Gunnery Sgt. Charles B. Ringo, MAG-14 operations chief, more than eight different squadrons participated in the exercise, including Marine Attack Squadrons-231 and 542, Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron-167, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron-261, Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron-2, Marine Fighter Attack Squadrons-115 and 533, Marine Wing Support Support Squadron-273 and Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron's-14, 26 and 31.

"We brought 1,100 Marines and have seven different plane model series, including [AV-8B Harriers], [F-18 Hornets], [KC-130 Hercules], [UH-1N Helicopters] and [CH-46 Sea Knight Helicopters]," said Maj. Brian Zacherl, MAG-14 future operations officer.

During the exercise, the Marines performed close-air support, helicopter escorts and strike coordination and reconnaissance on the live-fire ranges around Yuma and El Centro.

"The Yuma and El Centro areas provide for more high-explosive ordnance training," said Zacherl. "There's no [ideal] place on the East Coast to drop live ordnance."

Striking Hawk was conceptualized by Maj. Gen. John G. Castellaw,

commander of the 2nd Marine Air Wing, and began on Aug. 17. The exercise concluded Sept. 17.

HRST Course teaches 22nd MEU Marines

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. - Although the helicopter has revolutionized warfare with its unique ability to deliver troops into almost any location, there are still places where even helicopters need a little extra reach. As their deployment draws closer, approximately 40 Marines from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) now possess the skill to provide that added reach.

As graduates of two iterations of the Helicopter Rope Suspension Training (HRST) Master's Course, these Marines can facilitate the insertion or extraction of Marines and sailors into even the most remote locations such as thick forests, congested urban sprawl, or precarious mountain passes.

"We teach the Marines how to rig CH-46Es, CH-53s, and UH-1Ns for fast-ropeing, SPIE (Special Purpose Insertion Extraction), and rappelling," said Gunnery Sgt. Jim Boutin, lead instructor for the HRST Course, which is run by the II Marine Expeditionary Force's Special Operations Training Group. "We aren't a formal school so they [the students] don't receive an MOS [military occupational specialty], but a designator and a lot of great experience."

Participants in the course included Marines from the MEU Command Element and its ground combat element, Battalion Landing Team 1st Bn., 6th Marines, as well as a smattering of Marines from units outside the MEU. According to Cpl. Edward



Lance Cpl. Ismael O. Marquez

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, Ariz. -Marines from Marine Attack Squadron-231 load ordnance onto an AV-8B Harrier. MAG-14 visited the station from Aug. 17 to Sept. 17 to conduct Exercise Striking Hawk, a large-scale aviation training exercise.

L. Jacobs, a squad leader with C Co., BLT 1/6, his command's intent is to try to have at least one HRST master in each platoon in the battalion.

Bikers pass the word on 650cc Enduros

QUEENSLAND, Australia - In 2002, motorcross superstar Ricky Carmichael stunned the world when he completed the first-ever, perfect motorcross season. The same year, freestyle maniac Brian Deegan turned heads when he landed the first successful back flip on a dirt bike. The life of a pro rider can be full of action, money and worldwide recognition, but there are some professional dirt bikers out there who actually serve a more practical purpose.

Marine Corps scout messengers, mounted atop specially made Kawasaki 650cc enduro motorcycles, have the important task of relaying messages, delivering equipment and obtaining information on the battlefield. It may not be professional competition, but it's a job reserved for those who need speed and action as a part of daily life.

"It's got to be the most fun job in the Marine Corps," said Lance Cpl. Mike Nolan, a scout messenger with Headquarters Co., 3rd Marine Regiment at MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay. "People come up to us all the time and ask us about our jobs. We just tell them the truth; we love to work."

The 3rd Marine Regiment has two motorcycles assigned to complete the messenger scouting tasks of its three infantry battalions. The constant flow of message traffic keeps the riders busy speeding between command positions and other key areas during training exercises across the world, throughout the year.

Johnny Campbell, the famed desert enduro racer reaches speeds more than 100 miles per hour during many races. Moving with speed and agility across rough terrain is a task better suited to a dirt bike than a Humvee because of its size and maneuverability.

"I think the bike could probably go that fast if I really opened her up," said Nolan, a Farmington, Conn.,

native. "We're really not allowed to do that though, because if you go down out there and hurt yourself, you're riding all alone and it could be a while before someone finds you."

Scout messengers wear full protective gear, much like pro racers, only they're olive green in color, and do not attract near as much attention. One of the main benefits of having tactical motorcycles is their small size and relatively quiet exhaust system.

Nolan recalled seeing Marine scout messengers in a recruiting video he saw before entering the Marine Corps. The images of Marines in full-on motorcross gear stuck in his head, even after he was initially assigned as a radio operator with 3rd Marine Regiment.

"I just kept my eyes and ears open, because I knew they had bikes here. As soon as a position opened up, I jumped at the chance to go to school and become a messenger."

Nolan and other Marine Corps scout messengers may never achieve the status or level of recognition received by superstars like Jeremy Mcgrath or Roger DeCoster, but like being a Marine, riding is a way of life that is hard for others who aren't involved to understand.

"I just love to ride," said Nolan. "I honestly can't think of a better way to spend an enlistment."

Latin forces ready to take charge in Iraq

AN NAJAF, Iraq - Latin American forces are taking on an historic role as they prepare to replace Marines in Iraq's holy city of An Najaf.

The Spanish Brigade, which is comprised of one battalion each from El Salvador and Honduras, as well as a command element from Spain, arrived three weeks ago.

During that short period, the forces have been working side-by-side with members of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, which prepares to return toTwentynine Palms, Calif.

The brigade is part of the Polish-led Multinational Division that is assuming control of five southern Iraqi provinces from the I Marine Expeditionary Force.

This marks the first time that troops from El Salvador or Honduras have

been deployed to support an operation of such magnitude, said Lt. Col. Santiago Sabino Monterroza, commander of the Battalion Cucastlan, which was the first Latin American contingent to arrive in Iraq.

Monterroza said his battalion's performance so far has exceeded his expectations.

"I think it is going very well," he said. "Our soldiers are very motivated. We are very motivated to accept the responsibility."

Dividing the 40,000-square-kilometer province in half, both battalions took charge of Najaf Sept. 5, less than three weeks after arriving in Iraq.

The Honduran soldiers operate in the northern part of the province, and El Salvador's troops occupy the south.

To get ready for their mission, the 700 soldiers rehearsed for months back in their countries of origin.

Each unit concentrated on such things as manning traffic checkpoints, handling prisoners of war, carrying out patrols and conducting convoy operations.

Currently, the Latin contingents are carrying out those same duties in the Najaf province.

Major Kyle Ellison, operations officer for 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, said the Latin battalions, working independently and jointly, have already scored key accomplishments, including the seizure of a number of illegal small arms at roadway checkpoints and a successful raid on a Ba'ath Party meeting house.

"Each battalion does its own planning for its battlespace," Ellison said. "They have been successful at securing critical infrastructure such as the fuel pipeline, the water treatment plant and the ASP."

The ASP, or ammunition supply point, is a huge parcel of land northwest of the city where large concrete bunkers house tons of Iraqi munitions.

The responsibility of ensuring security of the site, as well as other critical points in northern Najaf, falls to Honduras' Battalion Xatruch.

Besides assuming control of the Marines' military operations, each brigade will assist the Spanish in continuing the ambitious reconstruction effort began by the Marines.

That first steps a doozie . . .



Sgt. Bradley Shaver

Lance Cpl. Kevin Mullins, Mike Company, Task Force Rawhide, repels down a side of a cliff more than 100 foot to the ground during bilateral training with the French Foreign Legion at the French Commando Training Center located at Arta Beach, Sept. 8.